

Wharton State Forest Motorized Recreation Plan

Stakeholder Meeting 2 – Local Mayors

October 14, 2015

6:30 – 8:30 pm

Ideas/Thoughts/Questions raised during the meeting

Main damages caused by?

Seemed to be a consensus that mudding/mudders was the main cause of all the problems/environmental damage.

Many suggestions were for finding the root of the problem – [thought to be] the mudders and fixing it at the root. Is there another place mudders can [legally] go?

LAW ENFORCEMENT INCREASE/TASK FORCE APPROACH

MANY call for increases in law enforcement and law enforcement activity, especially to catch & prosecute the mudders

Problem is that very few people are getting caught/fined for illegal activity.

Any kind of closures are not working because people are ignoring the rules anyway.

“Closing” needs enforcement

How do we get money to ... increase law enforcement?

How can we [talk big money] and get to \$3million to get more law enforcement?

Enforcement is the bottom line

Suggestions: TASK FORCE – Do a few high-intensity operation at times and places where we know there to be these damaging activities. Do one or two coordinated events. This will dissuade future activities. (Can municipalities help with this?)

Need visible officers & coordinated enforcement

Pick a date and put on class 2s, deputize volunteers, and have a coordinated law-enforcement event.

Use same approach as Dumping Task Force.

NEW LAWS/LEGISLATION

This whole process is being rushed – take more time and do it right. May need new laws.

Some mudders have vehicles that are not street legal. Easy to enforce law. But some are street legal vehicle but doing damaging mudding activity – what do they get charged with? Some (most) of the damage is being done by people in street legal vehicles.

Write new laws. Write new law to reflect that enforcement action will be taken against the owner of the vehicle (because you can't always identify who is driving the vehicle if just using cameras)

What other activities are tearing up the forest? Can new laws be written [to ban them]?

Laws – Look for changes if needed (What will be an enforceable offense?)

New legislation needs teeth.

BETTER EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION/PR/SHARED EFFORTS

SUGGEST: Your (DEP) immediate communication should be that MAP is suspended and we are now focusing on law enforcement.

People who are against the MAP are not just the mudders, they are quiet hunters and wildlife enthusiasts. You can bring groups of people together if you suspend the MAP and focus on catching the people who are damaging the forest.

Need to improve public awareness. Need a COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

Nobody has ever talked this much about Wharton State Forest before, how do we capitalize on all this attention?

Mayors/Towns can partner to get a coordinated message out (Advisories) to residents. E.g. when roads are wet/flooded they get damaged with regular or heavy use. If you get caught doing illegal things in the forest, you will be brought to justice. If there's a fire, stay out of the forest. If it's been very wet, don't drive on the roads (they are not real roads and can't handle it); etc. To do this, we give them the information to broadcast.

Even people coming from out of the area will get the message (via social media)

We need to develop public education programs

Share on our website where we are in the process. Keep people informed of the stages as we go.

Possible partnerships:

Shared services – but only EMS and Fire possible because many do not have police (they use state police).

Shared messaging/communications

Mayors want the map with the data layers sent to them electronically - but after it is all sorted.

DON'T "CLOSE" ANY ROADS

If you close roads, then only the people breaking the laws will be back there. Good people who would report bad behavior will not be there to see any violations.

Some of the roads that are closed lead to amazing wildlife areas that I want to go there and see the amazing wildlife and never damage anything.

Advice: Don't use the word 'closed'. Don't 'close' roads

(Even closing won't help because illegal users will still disobey rule)

SUMMARY

3 phases

- 1) Enforcement – Increase enforcement and have coordinated events
- 2) Education – getting the message out
- 3) Maintenance – keep working on improving/fixing the roads.

OTHER

"Get rid of the MAP program"

There is now lack of trust with the DEP and people are expecting the MAP to be implemented with very little change despite this process.

MAINTENANCE

Look into: What roads are county roads. Can county help to maintain? What are town roads? Can towns help maintain?

Jeep groups – good for clean ups.